

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

2008

Bringing African Dance and Drumming to Rural Northern Colorado

Melissa Claeys

The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Claeys, Melissa, "Bringing African Dance and Drumming to Rural Northern Colorado" (2008). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 1261.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/1261>

This Professional Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

Bringing African Dance and Drumming to Rural Northern Colorado

By

Melissa Dawn Claeys

**BME University of Montana,
Missoula, MT**

**Professional Paper
Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements**

For the degree of

**Master of Arts In Fine Arts
Integrated Arts and Education**

**The University of Montana
Missoula, Montana**

Summer 2008

Approved by:

**Dr. David A. Strobel, Dean
Graduate School**

**Dorothy Morrison, Chair
Fine Arts**

**Dr. Randy Bolton
Fine Arts**

**Michael Johns
MA Fine Arts**

Bringing African Dance and Drumming to Rural Northern Colorado

Chairperson: Dorothy Morrison

Abstract

For my Final Creative Project, I set out to bring change to a rural Colorado school. I was to propose and pilot a unit in African Drumming. My eventual goal was to have this class offered for the fall of 2008 in the student class handbook and be able to teach this course. I began my process in the summer of 2007 engaging in conversations with my future colleagues asking for their support in this goal. We were able to come upon an agreement that I would be able to write and propose a new course with an accompanying curriculum to the school board and along with this; teach a “pilot unit,” during the spring semester of 2008 to a class of Humanities students. My unit in African Drumming would encompass their studies in the non-western style of music and culture. I was given two weeks to work with these students and have a culminating day where I would bring in guest drummers to play with the kids.

My eventual goal of this project was to help convince the administration that offering a class in this discipline would enhance the school’s curriculum and that they would support me in my endeavor.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
----------------	---

Chapters

My Intentions	1
The Foundation	7
The Beginning	11
The Proposal	14
Preparing and Teaching my Pilot Unit.....	16
Zena	21
The Epilogue	26
How the Creative Pulse has affected me as an Artist and a Teacher.....	27

Appendixes

Appendix A—Grant Proposal for the Mockingbird Foundation.....	29
Appendix B—Grant Proposal for Realtors.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Appendix C—Pilot Unit Syllabus & Lesson Plans....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
References	40

My Intentions

"When the music changes so does the dance." African Proverb

Change is scary. Change is exciting. Change is hard to handle. Change is Ok in small doses. I had a LARGE dose of change this year, new husband, new home, and a new job. It would have been easy if I could have separated everything out one by one, but unfortunately during my daily life, each was affecting me in different ways. I needed to *make a change myself* to feel comfortable. I could not and cannot change my husband and we both were learning about the changes that occur when you are newly married. I could not change where I was living, but learn to enjoy and love it. In my new job, I found that I had the power to change things; to allow myself that one strand of control; to take hold of what was offered to me and create something wonderful; to learn and prosper regardless of how uncomfortable I might feel. My final creative project came into play to help me through this time. Here I was in a small rural community, in the spotlight and under the gun much of the time. Every week it seemed the newspaper wanted to interview us and know what was going on in the Music program at Windsor High School. The community wanted to be sure that Matt Drase, my colleague and head band director, and myself were carrying on the legacy left behind by the previous head band director.

I wanted to find my place in this community. My class load included marching band, concert band, wind ensemble, jazz ensemble, jazz band, and also a new orchestra program. This was a typical instrumental music program. It offered all the natural components. It was normal. It was a haven for what I intended to do.

Having taken a job in Windsor, Colorado, a small rural bedroom community in the northern part of the state, I found myself in a very different situation than I had ever been in before. Here, the students had everything they needed. Here, my students were well cared for and had opportunities awaiting them at every turn. Here, the students were safe. Here, the students were bored. In a school of 1000 students about 400+ were involved in the music department. When walking through the halls, one could see their energy their creativity and their excitement about what they did. It was obvious that other students were in some way lacking this inspiration in their lives. To graduate from WHS, students had to have a certain number of fine arts credits. General fine arts classes were offered in the form of "Rock and Roll History," which attracted all the head banging thugs that thought they had a band or "Humanities," which was not all that popular and enrollment was fairly low. This was how they experienced the arts. My intent and my final project was to amend this situation; to see if I could offer something new through my own passions, to bring African Dance and Drumming to Windsor High School.

**Final Creative Project Proposal for Melissa Claeys
Master of Arts in Fine Arts, Integrated Arts and Education**

Desired Chair and Committee Members:

- Dorothy Morrison—Chair
- Randy Bolton—Committee Member, Alternate Chair
- Michael Johns—Committee Member

Proposal:

For this project, my intent is to pilot a unit of West African Drumming studies during a Humanities course offered at Windsor High School. I originally wanted to offer a complete semester course in West African Drumming, but as I was recently hired to this school district I was not able to present this to the administration in time for student registration. Through this project I plan to offer a carefully designed unit and learning experience, 2-3 weeks long, which will expose students to this art form of music and possibly open the door to them for musical expression. I also am hoping to broaden their horizons or perception of the world by taking them “into” the culture of West African Drumming.

I feel that I am prepared to take on this challenge as my Final Creative Project. My first Creative Project involved starting and building an elementary DRUM club. This project proved to be very successful, covered all general aspects of drumming, and was taught at a level appropriate for upper elementary students. In recent years, I have taken many different workshops in drumming

and also taught a semester course in World Drumming at the middle school level. This course was designed to appeal to those students who were “at risk,” academically and emotionally. It was a great avenue for students to express themselves in a non-threatening environment. This summer I enrolled in Dorothy Morrison’s West African Drumming course, which ignited my inspiration and excitement for this project.

Timeline:

This project has two major phases, securing funds to purchase equipment and the actual implementation and teaching of the West African Drumming Unit.

My first task will be to write a grant proposal to the Mockingbird Foundation. This foundation supports Music Education as an integrated part of public school education. My Letter Of Inquiry is due August 1st, 2007. I will know if I am invited to submit a grant proposal by October at the very latest. Assuming I am invited to submit a proposal, I will submit and hopefully receive funds by early spring. As soon as I know I have received money, I will order the drums to teach the unit. The Unit will be taught during the months of March or April, depending on drum arrival.

In the case that I am not able to purchase drums for this project, I am in the process of contacting educators in the Denver Metro and Northern Colorado area, looking for Drums that I could borrow to teach this unit. I have already contacted Project Drum and Fara Tolno as a resource to help in designing and teaching this unit. Fara Tolno is a Master Drummer and Dancer who teaches and has a troupe in the Denver area. He has a counterpart with whom he teaches by

the name of Facinet Bangoura, a Master Balafon player. Together, they teach workshops on a continual basis and bring their troupe out to schools to do hands on teaching with the students and teachers. I am looking forward to becoming more acquainted with Fara and Facinet and studying with them. I have also contacted a group by the name of “Fale,” in Fort Collins that plays and teaches West African Drum and Dance. This group meets on a weekly basis in my town and hopefully will be a great resource for support and inspiration during this journey.

Anticipated Outcomes:

I anticipate that this project will open doors for me as a teacher and an artist. I hope to implement a full semester course, not this school year, but in the following year. I would like to see this program grow as an outlet for students who still are looking for a musical class to participate in and do not take part in the traditional music curriculum. As time progresses it would be fun to have a performing ensemble grow out of this curriculum. I see this project as an opportunity for me to find my place in this new community I am entering and to also provide another outlet for our school to be showcased as a program that offers musical learning experiences to ALL students, hence building the program in the long run.

As an artist, taking on this challenge will stretch and challenge me. It will force me to learn and relearn skills I have previously mastered in my musical career. I am reaching out to a new culture of music, one that interests me and seems to be adding a new “spark,” and renewed energy to my already practiced

art form, music. I am an aspiring dancer as well, and this fits perfectly in the sense that West African Drumming and West African Dance are so closely related, that there is little separation between the two, allowing me to bring both of my favorite art forms into the classroom.

The Foundation

I fell in love with drumming back in college. My percussion methods class was so fresh and exciting to me. The rhythms and sounds that could be created with these instruments has always been something that could move and inspire me. When I began my teaching career, in the Denver Metro area, I first taught drumming to a group of students who were gangsters, kids who had no reason in life but to survive their neighborhoods. I chose to use Will Schmidt's method, "World Drumming." The reason that I chose this curriculum was by pure chance. I happened to be browsing a teaching catalog one day and I came across his method book and video for sale as a set for only \$75.00! Keep in mind that I was teaching in an under funded school and any new materials that I desired as a teacher, I usually had to purchase myself. I was able to buy this curriculum and teach myself for a very small amount. I found Will's method to be easy to understand and it fit perfectly with my student's experience level, which was zero. The population that I taught at this school had never experienced a music class before. The surrounding elementary schools did not have enough funding to hire music teachers. My percussion class became very popular with the general population of students. Tough kids were purposely placed in my class. Along with this, the administration placed my class first thing in the morning so that they would show up to school, their plan formulating in the belief that if these gangster kids came to first hour they might attend the rest of the school day. Drumming for these students was a release and way to express themselves without having to say much at all. It was a physical way for them to get rid of aggression and tension. It became their therapy. My class was extremely successful and

opened my eyes as a teacher to how powerful this type of curriculum could be for students.

After teaching in Denver Public Schools for three years I chose to change jobs and move to another school district. Opposite to the under funded, hard to serve schools in Denver, I moved to a more suburban district in Jefferson County, Colorado. This school district is one of the best in the state and is very well respected. My position in this job was to teach elementary band and orchestra at 5 different schools, coordinate concerts between all of them and build the program to get as many kids as possible involved. At the time when I took the position, the program was dwindling and needed a boost. I started my first year just filling the requirements that were asked of me. I worked hard and built my program, doubling the number of students involved in elementary band and orchestra. It was a very successful year and I was looking forward to more success the following year. That summer I attended the Creative Pulse for the first time. I left the Pulse feeling empowered to make a difference and not afraid to think outside the box in how I could build my program. For my creative project I decided to target just one of my schools to keep things simple. When I returned to school that fall, I proposed the idea that in the spring semester I would teach an after school "DRUM Club." My principal immediately liked this idea, as there was a need for after school programs for the kids to participate in. My idea had two motives, one to please my principal but also to build my program in the band and orchestra department. I decided that if students entered band and orchestra in 5th grade, I needed to target the 4th graders. I figured if I could get to know these students then they would be more apt to sign up for instrumental music

their 5th grade year. So, I offered my DRUM club to all 4th, 5th, and 6th graders. This way I would also have plenty of numbers in the club to make it worthwhile. As the spring semester grew closer I planned and collected drums to teach the club. I borrowed drums from ALL the elementary schools that I taught at and also from local middle schools and high schools. It is amazing what you can find to bang on in an old high school band room, many times, the drums that I used were old marching band drums that the teachers were happy to give up. All I had to do was fix them up a bit and I could have them.

Around Christmas time, a brochure went out to all the students advertising what the spring after school programs would be, DRUM club was included in this brochure. I was not sure if kids would be interested or not. Surprisingly there was an overwhelming response. At the first DRUM club meeting over 60 students showed up to take part. It was quite amazing to see this many kids interested. We immediately decided that DRUM club would not take place in the music room, and that I would need the gym to practice in. It was kind of fun to see the look on my principal's face when she saw how many students were wanting to play the drums. As the semester went on, DRUM club performed at student assemblies and at my area wide concert. I did this on purpose so that parents and principals at all of my schools would see this program. I secretly hoped that this would gather even more support for this program. The result was an installation of a DRUM club at every elementary school in the area. At the end of the year the principals asked if I would rotate the club every quarter, teaching it at a different school so that all the kids in the district would have the opportunity to experience the power of these drums. This project was a success. What

started as a very simple plan and idea exploded into something huge. It was truly a moving experience.

The Beginning

I began the process of my Final Creative Project during the second summer of my Creative Pulse experience. I enrolled and took Dorothy Morrison's West African Drumming Class and just knew that this was the direction that I wanted to go with my endeavors. About halfway through the West African Drumming week I talked to Dorothy Morrison about my intent for my final creative project, very excited about what I was going to do and realizing also that it would be a huge challenge. I had decided that I would start an African Ensemble at Windsor High School, my brand new job. In making this decision Dorothy cautioned me, I was in a new job, I did not know the administration or anyone in the school district. She encouraged me to pursue building the foundations for a full program by teaching a "pilot unit," during the course of the next school year.

Knowing what typical education funding is like in this day and age, I knew that a big hurdle to overcome in forming an African Ensemble would be securing funds needed to purchase the equipment. I knew that I would need between four and five thousand dollars in order to adequately form a program. I immediately got on the Internet and searched for grants that I would qualify for. This was no easy task as I was going to be teaching in a community that did not have any financial hardships, students at risk, or recognized minority groups to be spoken of. I filled out and applied for many different grants, some did not even reply to my inquiries. I ended up submitting complete applications for two grants, one with the "Mockingbird Foundation," and the other with a Real Estate group in Colorado. For particulars on these proposals please see Appendix A and B (pages 30 and 32). Though my efforts were valiant the results were not positive.

Both of the grants were denied, so I knew immediately that the only way for me to get my proposed course approved would be by convincing my school district that this was a valuable avenue to explore and the benefits it would provide to the students would be worthwhile.

I began my campaign for the African Ensemble with my new colleague Matt Drase. Matt was the head director of instrumental music and I had just been hired for the assistant director of instrumental music position. Matt was the previous assistant director and had moved up into the head director's position. I knew that if I could not convince him of my idea my project would go nowhere.

I spoke with Matt about the possibility of me teaching an "African Drumming Unit," to his Humanities class for two weeks in the spring semester of the school year. My plan was to teach this unit to show the administration what could possibly become of a curriculum like this one. Matt agreed to switch classes with me for two weeks, to allow me to teach this curriculum. I chose his Humanities class because it would contain a cross section of the typical students that would sign up for my course. This course would be offered to students who needed to obtain some fine arts credits for graduation. They would have no background in music, and would come from all different walks of life. In some ways Matt and I took a risk with this decision, we did not clear anything with the administration we simply planned on just doing it. Matt did not like teaching his Humanities course and claimed that many of the students who participated were not all that excited about taking it either. He gladly jumped on board in helping me to get rid of this class to replace it with my proposed African Drumming course.

In the mean time I was desperately searching for other forms of help in this Creative Project. I knew that I would need training and some assistance from someone who knew what they were doing. Though Dorothy Morrison was a great asset, she would be 2,000 miles away while I was completing the bulk of this project; I needed someone a little bit closer to home. I again searched the Internet looking for African Ensembles in the area. To my surprise I discovered that in Fort Collins, Colorado there is a professional African Drumming Troupe by the name of Fale. I immediately placed a call into Isaac Hilpman the number listed on the website. Isaac did not answer his phone on the first call so I timidly left a message about my plan and that I was seeking professional help and guidance in this endeavor. I received a call back the very next day. To my surprise, Isaac was extremely supportive claiming he would love to be involved and that he would help me in whatever way he could. He immediately wanted to help, offering drums to borrow, and for me to come and play with his ensemble learning and sitting in to gain insight into how the Art of African Drumming should be taught. His main concern was that I taught African Drumming in a very authentic way to preserve the heritage and art of the music; he welcomed me into his group to learn and educate myself.

I was well on my way to creating the first ever African Ensemble in a high school curriculum in Northern Colorado.

The Proposal

As the school year progressed, there came a time when the course handbook needed to be created for the following school year in the fall. In order for me to secure that my class would be offered I needed to convince the administration to slate the African Drumming Class in the course book. This was no simple task. I found myself sitting in the principal's office with Matt Drase explaining the benefits of African Drumming and why the school district should invest almost \$4000 in funds to purchase the equipment needed to start this program. At this point I divulged to the administration that I would like to teach a pilot unit to a group of students for two weeks, giving them a chance to see and experience what my vision was before they made the final decision to implement the course. Matt and I had come up with a master plan on how to change what we offered the students at Windsor High School in the order of music classes. We explained to my principal, Rick Porter, how stale and unexcited students were when they took the general music classes that were currently offered, Humanities and the History of Rock and Roll. Humanities being the one the most disliked. Also, at the time Matt was teaching both of these general music classes and was getting burned out. I felt that I should share this load with him, but I was not at all interested in teaching something dull and uninteresting. As in all education funding the answer I received from Rick Porter was numbers, it all came down to student interest and the number of students who would be willing to take the class. At the end of the meeting, the agreement was that I would write a course description and submit it to the Board of Education, if the class was approved as viable and

legit than it would be included in the course book for the fall of 2008. The description I wrote is as follows:

MUB115 AFRICAN DRUMMING

Credit: .5(semester course)

Prerequisite: None

Elective for: 9th-12th grade

African Drumming is open to all Windsor High School students. This will be a performing group that will explore the history, culture and music of Africa through the art of drumming. Some dance and singing may also be taught. No previous experience in drumming is required as all skills needed, will be taught in class. The students will perform in one concert and possibly attend Solo and Ensemble Festival. Other concerts or performances may be added by the director.

This portion of the story went quite well for me, as the board approved my proposal and course description, the class was inserted into the course book and I had to sit back and just wait to see if the students would pull through for me.

Preparing and Teaching my Pilot Unit

Now that I had planted the seed in the administration's minds, I was ready to start planning and preparing for my pilot unit. This was the exciting and fun part of this project. I mentioned before that I received a lot of support and encouragement from the members of Fale, particularly Isaac Hilpman. Before he would work with me any further on the project he requested a meeting with me personally. So one Saturday morning, I met him for coffee at the local Starbucks. I discussed with him how I became interested in African Drumming in the first place and what my goals were for my project. By the end of the meeting he admitted that he was surprised to see a teacher so set on pursuing this; most teachers begin down this road and usually give up. He also admitted that the reason he wanted to speak with me face to face was to see how committed I was to this project before he or the members of his troupe invested any time or materials in my project. At the end of this meeting I was invited to come and play with Fale on Sunday evenings. These sessions were open to the public but were not well attended, so most of the time I received a lot of individual work on my drumming technique. I was able to learn several different African rhythms as well as dance moves. These Sunday night classes did and will continue to serve me as a great resource for new ideas. Having the opportunity to drum and dance with professionals has been so much fun and very inspiring.

Another person who was key in my pilot unit was Nathan Vellinga from One Tree Drums. Nathan is the founder of One Tree Drums, a company that plants three trees in Africa for every drum that is made by the company; these efforts are to alleviate the pressure being put on forests in Africa due to the demand for

wood to make drums. The company specializes in ethnic drums of all varieties, mostly from the area of Guinea. Isaac Hilpman from Fale put me in contact with Nathan so I wrote him an email explaining my situation. I was so excited when I heard that he would be willing to support me in any way he could, it made me even more excited to teach this unit and to get a class installed at Windsor High School.

After much of this groundwork was done, I began finalizing plans for my pilot unit and started contacting other people about borrowing drums to use during my unit. With no money to spend on this endeavor, I was relying on acquaintances and friends in a new town where I was brand new. I contacted many different drumming vendors asking them if they would help, most replies where that they would be happy to help for a small fee. I contacted the surrounding Universities, surely they would help me out, but the replies that I received were dismal. All of the professors I contacted either did not have the drums I needed, or they needed to use their equipment during the same time I needed to borrow from them. I contacted local teachers and rounded up any drums that would work even if they weren't all African, I ended up with a lot of congas. Slowly but surely I was able to secure a drum here and there to finally get a class set of drums to use for this unit. I ended up borrowing from about 15 different people and groups to get what I needed to adequately teach the class.

My next task in preparing this unit was to decide what exact material to teach the students. I knew that I would have to do an abbreviated version of what I would teach in the full course since I only had two weeks to work with the students. For my course the next year I had decided to use a curriculum by

Alfred Publishing. The name of the curriculum was West African Drum and Dance , A Yankadi-Macrou Celebration. I studied this curriculum pretty intensely picking out key lessons that I would use during my pilot unit. I decided to teach a portion of the Yankadi rhythm since it seemed a little bit easier for students to grasp on to in a short time. Also, during my summer studies through the Creative Pulse I had studied both Yankadi and Macrou with Dorothy Morrison, making my familiarity with these rhythms much more grounded. Between studying the curriculum through Alfred and also my studies with the Creative Pulse I felt fully equipped to teach this unit to a set of high school students and I knew that I could be successful.

As I approached my pilot unit I was very careful to take into consideration the type of students that I would be working with. These students did not have a musical background; I found myself reverting back to some techniques I used to use with my elementary students. Writing out parts in a way that a beginner could understand, I even used some orff instruments to teach the unit as they are more accessible for a beginner in the musical field. Many of these students considered this class as a filler to get them to graduation so there was not a whole lot of investment on their parts to be involved in the activities. I found that I needed to hook the students if I was going to be able to get to know them well and get them to feel comfortable with me in just two weeks. I planned each lesson very carefully and then went back and revamped these lessons as I taught the unit itself. These lessons can be found in Appendix C (page 33).

It was interesting to take note of the change that took place in the students from day one to the last day of my pilot unit. The first day of class, many of the

students were excited to put their Humanities books away and try something new for a few weeks. I spent a lot of this class discussing the culture in Africa and where the origins of the rhythms came from. I wanted to be sure that the students understood that this was not just a “bang the drum session,” but a cultural experience as well, and the material they were learning was very real to a culture that resided in a different part of the world. I could definitely tell that by the end of my presentation the students were ready to play, but also had a new respect for what we were going to do, as opposed to their desire to just play the drums at the beginning of class.

During the course of the two weeks, I had a great time with these students. It was interesting to me how close I became to many of them in such a short time. I truly believe that part of this was opened up to me through the tangible act of playing drums in a circle together. There was never a moment when the students sat at desks for any length of time. We always were in a circle, in this way I was face to face with every student. I also feel that learning any physical activity is impossible when you are not open to what is going on around you, every student had to take a risk in my class to learn the rhythms that at first were very uncomfortable to them. By going through this experience, in some way all students grew a little from the class. Many dealt with some inner struggles with self-confidence and motivation. Most students, by the end of the class were very proud of what they had accomplished and seemed to have learned not only a lot about African Drumming but also themselves.

The last day of class proved to be an exciting one for the students. I invited Isaac Hilpman to join us for the day and to come play with the kids. When he

walked in the door, he was so excited to have 26 drum players all at once! He was truly amazed as well with how well the students were doing with the djembe accompaniments they did know. I will never forget a particular moment during the class time with Isaac. At one point, he looked over at me and said, “this quite possibly is the coolest thing I have ever seen.” The look on his face told me that I had accomplished something powerful. Isaac had been trying to build the drumming community in Northern Colorado for years, by him helping me with this project he had fulfilled one of his goals, to spread the love of drumming throughout the state, this was definitely a step in the right direction for him.

The students were very captivated by Isaac. He could make the djembe speak in a way that they had never heard before. Isaac also spent a lot of time speaking to the culture and answering questions about African drumming and how he became interested. The students wanted to know more about his story. The entire day definitely made things more real for the students. At one point during the class, the administration dropped by to listen and observe. Though they only stayed for 10 minutes, they could tell that the students were very interested in the class and what they were doing. When they left, they pulled me aside to say that they understood why students would love this and they could see the energy in many of the students in how they were responding to the drums. I hoped that this was a foreshadowing of good news.

Zena

How one young girl changed me forever as a teacher.

I feel that the story that I am about to share with you truly represents what my intentions are as a teacher, when teaching something that is outside of the traditional curriculum. I chose to include this in my paper since it was a definite outcome of my project and could not be overlooked as it was incredibly powerful to me as a teacher and helped me to redefine who I am in the eyes of my students.

There was one girl in particular that reminded me so much of my students in Denver Public Schools where I first taught African Drumming. Her name was Zena. Matt Drase, the original teacher of the class, had forewarned me about her horrible attitude and how she was nothing but negative when he taught the class. On the first day, Zena did not hesitate to proclaim her outward disgust for the class in general and by no means would she be anymore interested or excited about this so-called Drumming unit. When I first laid out the rules for the students, I claimed that most of their grade would be largely based on participation. To this comment I promptly received a rebuke of, “well you can’t make me do anything I don’t want to do.” I knew immediately that this girl was going to be a challenge. And yet, I strangely felt overly comfortable around Zena for she was a mirror image of how MOST of my students acted from my Denver job. I silently formulated a plan for how I would get her on my side, and in doing so would show the rest of the class that there was something to be said about this particular teacher and how she conducted herself.

The second day I met with the students the opportunity presented itself all too easily. When I started class, I began with a warm-up of follow the leader, the students would echo back to me simple rhythms that I would play on the drum. Of course, Zena sat indignantly in her chair, refusing to touch her drum. I very playfully claimed, "Zena, remember that participation is a huge part of your grade," her response being, "I really don't care." My next comment was "well it is entirely up to you, you can stay there and play the drum, or you can come be my "best friend" and sit next to me, but because I care about my best friends you can bet that I will not leave you alone the entire class, until you are participating." She took the bait. She looked me straight in the eyes, folded her arms and silently challenged me by leaning back in her chair. I promptly responded, "Alright Zena, you are now my official best friend, get up here; you can sit right beside me." As she moved to the front of the class, she silently muttered something under her breath that was nothing short of negative and resentful. She sat down beside me and I continued with my exercises. Trying to draw the attention back to the class and not Zena. As I continued with the lesson I would lean over occasionally giving her a hard time about "it's just beating on a drum, you should try it, it's not so bad." "Zena, you should try smiling, it might make you feel better." And so on. At one point there was a lull in the class and I was able to have a side conversation with Zena, and I asked where her name came from. She immediately told me that she was named after her Aunt, who had been killed in Greeley, Colorado in a drive by gang shooting. She was very proud to be her Aunt's namesake and I could tell that she did not want any sympathy. My comment back, was that she should feel very special to be named after someone

so noble and that I am sure her Aunt was a very special woman. That was the pivotal moment. It was a moment that I will never forget, something changed in her face and eyes. The wall melted away, and she really did become my best friend. I had managed to connect. For me, it was a pivotal moment in my teaching career. I had connected on a personal level with a student, and in a moment she was loyal and she was my student. I had never done this before. I had never purposely reached out to a student to gain their trust. I had always relied on the idea that my students would love me for me and that I did not need to put forth such effort. For the first time ever, I felt like I had made a difference in one of my student's life.

In the days afterward, I saw Zena blossom in my class. She smiled when she walked into the door, she contributed to class, she was attentive, and she enjoyed herself. She never learned any other part but the most simple in the Yankadi rhythm, but it was her part and she took ownership of it. She had a place in the group that was very defined. For the first time since I had come to Windsor, I felt like I was a teacher. I had connected in a meaningful way, and though this particular student was not the smartest or most talented, she basked in the excitement of what she could do and had accomplished.

Later in the unit, I was teaching balafon parts to the students, which was for many of them very challenging. When it was Zena's turn to give it a shot, I was nervous at first that she would shut down on me and give up. When she approached the instrument I saw the hesitation and the look in her eyes that this was going to be too hard. I immediately reminded her of how just days before she knew nothing about rhythm and that now she was more or less an expert on

her drum, so therefore she could do this too. At first, Zena struggled, but as the class progressed you could see the pride well up inside her. At one point, I invited students to be the teachers and come help their peers with the balafon parts. Zena was one of the first to volunteer to teach a classmate how to play the part she had just learned not five minutes earlier. I saw Zena turn into a leader! I could not believe that this girl that claimed to hate everything about this class was now teaching and helping a classmate. Another powerful moment had just unfolded.

On my video you will see a clip of Zena, she is the Hispanic girl, who talks with a little bit of slang. She at first glance appears rough around the edges, but underneath the tough layer, there is a bright and energetic girl waiting to blossom. She did not know that I had chosen her to talk on my video until she showed up to class that day. After her interview, she came back inside and asked me, “why did you have ME talk on your video?” I simply told her with a smile, “because Zena, what you have to say is important to me.”

This story is a great example of my purpose in teaching African Drumming. There are so many opportunities for students to be successful. African drumming is very hands on and very tangible, therefore making it a real experience for the student. They are not only learning about music but living it and making the connection to the outside world as well. The dance and culture also learned in the curriculum, gives the students a real sense of what is beyond their hometown, that the world is a big place and there is so much to be learned and to understand. Zena is a testament to my mission with students. Though I only

knew the girl for two weeks, she is truly a friend. My contact with her made the entire unit worth it.

The Epilogue

Shortly after I finished my pilot unit, I was invited to a meeting with the principal Rick Porter. He explained to me that over 65 students had signed up for my class for the following year! He also explained that these numbers indicated that it was worthwhile for the school district to spend the money needed to begin such a program. This was all very exciting to me! I could not believe that I had managed to accomplish this goal. The school district is going to actually implement an African Ensemble at Windsor High School and buy all the necessary drums to do so! They are going to invest about \$4000 into this program. I would have the first and only African Ensemble in a Northern Colorado high school. Along with this, the schedule was changed and the boring Humanities class was dropped. Students will now have a chance to experience something hands on rather than through a textbook.

I already am working diligently on my class for next fall. I want the semester class to be a moving experience for the students. I want them to walk away with an understanding of African music and culture. I will be teaching both African drumming and African dance, since within this discipline the two go hand in hand. I also have plans to do a unit in having the students make their own African dugus and shekeres. Also, I am working closely with Fale still and hopefully the students will have an opportunity to perform with this group once during the semester. The high school dance instructor has already contacted me wanting to do an African piece with her dance team at a pep assembly or another performing venue. It seems that this curriculum will explode into something truly exciting.

How the Creative Pulse has affected me as an Artist and a Teacher

When I first set out to be a teacher, like many others I thought that I was going to do great things, change lives and be a shining star in my schools. As I started my career, I promptly realized that I had a lot to learn about teaching, and that quite possibly the 5 years that I spent in college preparing for these days had been ill spent. My first year of teaching I spent many nights awake, wondering what I was going to do with these kids, realizing that I hated attending class as much as they did. After about a year, I began to settle into a routine, I became more comfortable and things got a little better. Once I hit my 5th year of teaching I finally made the decision that I needed to be better at what I did. This is what brought me to the Creative Pulse. I wanted to be inspired again and to feel that I could make a difference. The Creative Pulse, pushed me. This program has forced me to take a look at my life to deal with things that I never wanted to deal with before. In doing so, it also inspired me to take on challenges with my job that I never would have dreamed of going after had I not realized my own capabilities.

Before I entered the Creative Pulse I recreated, I was not artistic. I never thought for myself and never went through with the crazy ideas that used to float around in my head. I would take those thoughts and shove them to the wayside telling myself that that was not possible or that I was crazy for thinking those thoughts would be a good idea. I stuck with the normal and expected. Through the process of personal performances I discovered that it is OK to think in different ways. It is OK to express yourself and to try out new ideas. It is OK if

things don't work the first time, it is part of the artistic process. I discovered that it is OK to desire and try for something that no one else thought of before and though people might look at you weird or think you might be crazy for trying these things, every once in a while you come up with something brilliant. I am a different person because of this entire process. I am more creative than ever before and my mind has expanded allowing me to be a better teacher because of it.

I teach through life experiences now. I am a teacher that connects emotionally with my kids. Things that happen in my classroom are now meaningful to my students. I share with my students now, stories about myself, I listen to their stories and learn from them. I hardly ever follow a textbook, I design the experiences around my students and the here and now. I am not afraid anymore to try something new and to go for whatever I feel strongly about. I live, learn and teach in the moment.

This entire process has been an amazing journey and story. I have been affected in so many ways. The experience of the Creative Pulse taught me how to experience and think in a creative and artistic way. Amazingly, I am starting to bring this way of living and these types of experiences into my own life and environment around me. The Creative Pulse is taking place in my world now, with my students and myself. I am so glad that I was able to take part in this program so aptly named, for now after two years of experiences and learning, I am pulsing with Creativity and I have blossomed as an artist. I make art now with my music and with every aspect of all the arts, I do not recreate anymore.

At the beginning of this paper I talked a lot about change. Change to me was a definite negative at the beginning of this process. I was very scared for all the changes that have taken place in my life over the last year. Probably the most important thing I have learned from this project is that change is not necessarily bad, it all depends on how you handle it and shape that change into something positive. Most importantly, I have learned and realized that *change* is critical to development.

APPENDIX A—GRANT PROPOSAL FOR THE MOCKINGBIRD FOUNDATION

To the Board Members of the Mockingbird Foundation:

It is my intent to submit a proposal for funding to support and institute an African Drumming Ensemble for students of the Weld County School District RE-4; specifically high school-aged students.

I would like to request project guidelines for such a program. The following project description will give you a brief overview of the planned initiative and information about the project's future in the Weld County School District RE-4.

Please forward all future correspondence to me, Melissa Claeys. I will be serving as the coordinator of this project. In addition, I would be happy to talk with you by telephone. You can reach me after 3:00pm, at (303) 503-7424. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Melissa Claeys

Project Description:

The Weld County School District RE-4 and Windsor High School seek funds to institute an African Drumming Ensemble, in efforts to provide students with a more culturally diverse music program and further their opportunities as musicians.

This project will serve high school students, grades 9-12. The program will be available to any student who has the desire to learn about African Drumming and is looking for an alternative outlet to their musical studies.

The project itself will begin in the spring of 2008 and will last indefinitely, with the anticipation that it will grow into a fully established performing ensemble that is a part of the Windsor High School curriculum.

Out of 178 school districts in the state of Colorado, Weld County School District RE-4 is 178th in funding from the state government. This poses a problem when seeking funds for starting a new program such as this project. Also, Windsor High School, serves a rural community with limited exposure to the outside world and different cultures. By implementing this curriculum students will have the opportunity to become exposed to a different culture while enriching their musical background.

In many cases there is a population of students at any given high school that are not interested in a traditional band or orchestra class. This program would serve to this population of students, allowing our Music Department to grow and invite more students to become musicians in an environment that is outside what is typically offered in a high school curriculum.

The funds requested will help to purchase enough Djembe's(25) and sets of complete Dundun(2-3) to begin an African Ensemble program. This ensemble will start in the form of a Unit taught to a general Humanities class. A culminating activity involving a performance of the music learned will take place during the school day. Use of the instruments in the form of a before school group will also be incorporated to kick start the program in the spring semester of 2008. A full African Ensemble Performing group will be implemented the following fall of 2008. This class will be open to all students in attendance at Windsor High School. No previous musical knowledge will be necessary as the purpose of this class is to give opportunities to those students who otherwise would not have a chance to learn about music in a culturally diverse environment.

APPENDIX B—GRANT PROPOSAL FOR REALTORS GROUP

1. Melissa Claeys has been teaching in Instrumental Music for 6 years. She is a goal driven teaching professional with a history that emphasizes the ability to develop and maintain a strong music program, through effective leadership skills, perseverance, and hard work. She received her BA from Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado. Here she received a double major in Music Education and Music Performance. Currently, she is completing her Masters from the University of Montana. Her track record demonstrates a rapid growth in programs as well as the promotion of the performing arts within a school's curriculum. Her involvement in professional organizations includes membership in the Colorado Music Educators Association and National Educators Association.
4. If grant monies are received, funds will be used to purchase a set of classroom djembes. The project itself is named "Learning about Music through African Drumming and Dance." The desired outcome is to implement a curriculum and class at Windsor High School to teach African Drumming and Dance. This class will be offered to ALL students that attend WHS, not just those who have a music background
7. Have applied for a national grant through the Mockingbird Foundation. Have not receive any funds as of yet.
8. Windsor School District is a rural district located in northern Colorado. In government funding, Windsor is ranked 178th out of 178 school districts in Colorado. By providing this grant money your association will be helping to implement a program that will last for years and impact many students. Drumming is something that many students can learn, even those who have a limited background in music. The classes taught by using these drums will be open to ALL students who attend Windsor High School. It will give non music students an opportunity to enjoy, learn and experience music while studying a different culture at the same time. This will provide for a diverse and rich atmosphere for students to experience music on a whole different realm.

15 Remo Key-Tuned Djembe's "12 x \$200 per drum

APPENDIX C—PILOT UNIT SYLLABUS & LESSON PLANS

African Drumming Unit

Teacher: Melissa Claeys

Dates: April 28th - May 9th

What to Expect: During this unit you will be experiencing a piece of the African Culture by learning some basic drumming techniques on ethnic instruments from the region. This is a hands-on experience as you will be playing the instruments and hopefully by the end of the course will be able to perform as an ensemble the piece learned during the unit. You will also be learning about the different cultural aspects involved with this music and the history behind the music as well.

Materials Needed: Yourself, your hands, a notebook and pen/pencil.

Expectations: Your grade for this unit will be determined by participation and a written test/quiz given at the end of the unit. Whenever experiencing something new for the first time it is important to keep an open mind as you will likely be placed in a situation that has a certain amount of “newness,” to it. Do not get frustrated and enjoy your time during this unit. 😊

Schedule/Syllabus:

April 29th

- ✓ History of the music, people, culture and Yankadi.
- ✓ Introduction to the instruments
- ✓ Begin to Drum, learn Djembe pattern #1 and add Dundun.

May 1st

- ✓ Review from previous lesson
- ✓ Add Djembe pattern #2 and Bali parts #1 and #2

May 5th

- ✓ Review from previous lessons
- ✓ Learn Bali pattern #3 and Djembe pattern #3

May 7th

- ✓ Review and practice
- ✓ Small group performances

May 9th

- ✓ Drumming with members of Fale and Food!

Lesson Plan #1/ African Drumming

***Have room set up already with instruments.

***As students enter room have each student write their name on a name tag and put it on left shoulder.

- Introductions and names.
- Pass out and discuss syllabus.
- Have students watch Cultural Section on the Yankadi/Macrou Celebration DVD.
- Begin by a short discussion of the Susu people, culture and history. Have students take the following notes:

West Africa:

West Africa is located south of the Sahara, often referred to as the “Bulge of Africa.”

There are many different ethnic groups, 14 different countries, each with its own music, culture, songs, dances and instruments.

We will be learning music of the Malinke and Susu people located in Guinea. There is also the Isle de Los, located off the coast of and close to Conakry.

Susu and French are the primary languages in Guinea, fishing is the main source of economic productivity.

Unlike Western Music, where music is used for primarily entertainment, in West Africa, music is a part of their daily lives.

Jelis—are the professional musicians and oral storytellers in West Africa.

Yankadi-Macrou Rhythm:

“Social Mixer and Dance”

This rhythm and dances is used as a social event, typically on a full moon night.

Yankadi: dance of seduction/slow swing feel.

Macrou: Faster upbeat temp, people will pair off and get to know one another.

The rhythms are mixed up and usually go back and forth during the celebration.

- Intro to drums and care of the equipment. Thanks to all who donated drums.

- Warm-ups on djembes.....
- Bass, Tone, Slap.
- Echo response in different combinations.
- Talk about the Break or Call for Yankadi and echo response this.
- If time add/learn Djembe accompaniment #1.

African Drumming Lesson #2

- Start with a warm-up with just the hands. Move to drums, getting faster and faster.
- Practice Bass, Tone and Slap separately and then in different patterns. Using Call and Repsonse.
- Review the Djembe #1 accompaniment. Start with body percussion first.
- Learn Djembe #2 accompaniment. Begin putting the two parts together.
- Begin to learn the Dun dun parts. Learn separately, break down and practice.
- At the end give notes on different drum names and their role in the ensemble. Review concepts covered in notes on Tuesday; oral quiz.

Shekere: shaker type instrument- hollow gourd, covered on the outside with beads

Djembe: goblet shaped drum, originated from large mortars used to pound rice and millet. Covered with goat and antelope skin, considered the voice of the Malinke and Susu people.

Dundun: family of double headed drums; come in 3 sizes:

Dundunba: largest, bass sound

Sangban: middle size, carries the pulse

Kenkeni: smallest; provides rhythmic basis for African ensemble

Balafon: xylophone type instrument, wooden bars with gourd resonators attached to the bottom, provide melody and harmonies for the African Ensemble.

African Lesson Plan #3

- Start with a warm-up with just the hands. Move to drums, getting faster and faster.
- Practice Bass, Tone and Slap separately and then in different patterns. Using Call and Repsonse.
- Review Dundun parts and play as three parts.
- Put the entire ensemble together with dundun and djembe accompaniments.
- Rotate the kids through these parts several times so they get to play all of them.
- Mini test playing test at the end of class. Each person plays both djembe part 1 and 2 by themselves.

African Lesson Plan #4

- Warm-up on Drums using different combinations of bass, tones and slaps.
- Learn Djembe pattern #3.
- Run Yankadi with all drum parts, rotate kids through parts.
- Talk about and teach ALL Bali Parts. Place xylophones in the center and rotate kids through so that they get to try all parts, using just the djembe #1 and #2 parts.
- Write the parts on the board.
- Mini Performance: Kids get to rotate from drums, to bali and back again. Arrangement on pgs. 112 & 113.
- Decide on who is bringing what on Friday for food and performance.

Bananas: Corey

Bananas: Josh Heyer

Pineapple: Brittany

Pineapple: Ganae

Mango(3): Michael

Mango(3): Bailey

Mango(3): Lindsay

Napkins: Zena

Plates: Marcus

Plates: Josh Hanson

Cups: Sam

Cups: Jack

Guinea Sorrel: Anthony Vega

Guinea Sorrel: Austin

Guinea Sorrel: Taylor

Forks: Lacey

Forks: Tony

Spoons: Shawna

Spoons: Jordan

Curried Corn: Kesia Cutlip

Curried Corn: Shante Garcia

Chicken a la N'Gatietro: Melanie Minear

Yassa Chicken: Jade Young

Benne Cakes: Forrest Gifford

Benne Cakes: Brandon

African Lesson Plan #5

- Set-up: Tables set up for food and drink. Djembes, Dundun, and Bali set up for playing.
- Introduce Guests and invite everyone to eat and try the food. Clean up trash and food.
- Warm-up with bass, tones and slaps. Echo and Response.
- Try layering in Bali parts with Djembe #1 and Dundun parts.
- Play Yankadi, use the following arrangement:

Break: Dundunba and bell

Break: add Sangban and Kenkeni

Break: add Djembe #1

Break: add Djembe #2

Break: add Djembe #3

Break: add X #1

Break: add X #2

Break: add X #3

Break: Everyone stops

Break at a FASTER tempo, everyone comes in together.

Break: Bali parts drop out

Break: Djembe parts drop out

Break: Dundun parts drop out

THE END

- Learn and play Macrou with Fale with whatever time is left. 😊

Video Interview Questions:

What did you think about the African Drumming unit you got to participate in?

Where you able to learn and do things you thought were challenging at first?
What were they specifically?

What did you get out of this unit, how did it make you feel to participate?

References

- Fale. *West African Drumming Troupe Meetings/Rehearsals*. Club Tico, Fort Collins, Colorado, 6 January- 27 April 2008.
- Kalani & Camara, Ryan. West African Drum and Dance: A Yankadi-Macrou Celebration. Van Nuys: Alfred 2006.
- Keita, Mamady. A Life for the Djembe: Traditional Rhythms of the Malinke. Arun- Verlag:4. Auflage 2004.
- Keita, Mamady. Djembefola. Produced and directed by Laurent Chevallier. 65 min. 1993. Videocassette.
- Morrison, Dorothy. *West African Drumming Workshop*. University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, 9-13 July 2007.
- Schmid, Will. World Music Drumming.: A Cross-Cultural Curriculum. Milwaukee: Hal Leonard 1998.